Hey Reference! Can you recommend a good book?

One of my favorite things to do as a reference librarian is to advise readers. Many people come to the reference desk asking for some book suggestions. That task usually consist of two parts: first, to identify what they like to read and second, to suggest similar books and authors. I always get excited, yet feel a little anxious at the same time. Anxious because, how do I know what they really like to read? Do the readers themselves even know their preferences? There are so many variables that go into a book being a great read. What if the book I recommend has the pace that might seem too slow or a character that is not interesting to the reader? What if I recommend the author who writes on the similar topic, but the tone and the writing style is not to the patron's liking?

But I do get excited, too. I like to think that I might be opening a completely new world for readers when I recommend new authors or even a new genre. Sometimes they think they don't like a particular genre, yet one great book in that genre can change their perception forever.

Still, for many years, the reader's advisory service was pretty much a guessing game on our part. Luckily, nowadays, we

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have a special program called "NoveList" that equips us with powerful tools, while enhancing and simplifying the task of reader's advisory service.

Since our library subscribes to the program, you can use it for free. You can find NoveList by choosing "Research" under "Digital Resources," on our webpage, www.wopl.org. On the research page, click to access online databases and NoveList is one of many that will be shown.

So how do you use this wonderful program? NoveList has a lot to offer and I would like to address several very useful sections.

I will start with some features at the top menu. Author Read-alikes is found under "Quick Links" on the top menu. At this time, it has approximately 300 articles, each identifying the main genres of the selected author, followed by the discussion on why readers like this author and then showing and discussing suggestions on Read-alike authors. You can also get another list of Read-alikes when you type the

name of the author in the search box, and select that author record. You will see the Read-alikes on the right side of that record.

If you are part of the book club, you will definitely appreciate the following several features on the top menu under Quick Links. One is the Book Discussion Guides feature that has about 800 guides and provides summaries, discussion questions, author biographies and suggestions on further reading. Using another feature, "Books to movie," will put you ahead of the game for book-based movies coming to the big screen in the current year. And, when you are trying to come up with the title for your next book discussion, browsing the list of award winners under "Browse By" at the top of the page might help.

My favorite part of Novelist, however, is something that is called "appeal mixer." You can get to that feature by clicking on "Try our appeal mixer" under "I'm in the mood for books that are … " on the home page, or by clicking on "Appeal" under "Browse By" at the top of the page. Either way, you will get to a screen that allows you choose up to three categories among the following six: character, illustration, pace, storyline, tone and writing style. Imagine,

for example, that you create a list of books for yourself by selecting a complex character, fast pace and intricately plotted storyline; this particular search brought 141 results. It's amazing how much customization exists and how fun this tool can be.

But what if you can't exactly pinpoint what kind of books you like to read? What you can do in this case is to type your favorite title into the search box on the main page. Once you get the record for that title, scroll down until you see the "Search for more" section. Here, not only will you see what categories this particular title falls into, but you can also select similar books.

NoveList is a great tool for all ages. It has separate sections with reader's advisory for adults, teens, tweens and children. It is also the kind of tool that I would enthusiastically recommend to all kinds of readers, from reluctant readers to avid readers and everyone in between. As always, if you need any additional information on NoveList, or any other program that our library subscribes to, don't hesitate to contact us at the reference desk.

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